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ABSTRACT

This practical guide discusses the challenges teachers will face when programming for language--that is, in planning an effective language program for their students. The guide includes ways to meet the challenges; suggestions for what to read, attend to, observe, write, and who to talk to; points to ponder before programming; and a model for programming units of work for language. (MS)

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Rhondda Brill

What is one of the most valuable gifts we can give language users?

We can litter their environment with enticing language opportunities and guarantee them the freedom to experiment with them.

(Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984)

Planning and documenting these 'enticing language opportunities' is a challenge. Terms such as *Language Experience*, *Whole Language*, *Integrated Language Arts* and *Language across the Curriculum* bombard us from every direction. Educational literature acclaims method 'x' as the greatest new teaching approach since Fluff and Nip and decries method 'y' as detrimental to our children's mental health. The media declare that literacy standards are falling (which they aren't) and politicians demand a return to the basics (which we never left). The curriculum for primary schools is loaded with every subject imaginable (be warned, Macrame across the Curriculum is next!), there are only six hours in the school day and programs are due at the end of week three! What does a teacher do? First, relax and do not panic. Second, read this PEN calmly. It doesn't claim to have all the answers but it might help put sense and sanity into programming for language.

CHALLENGE 1

To plan a language program which
- ~ aligns with current language learning theory
- ~ implements current, mandatory curricula
- ~ actively develops children's language
- ~ caters for individuality.

MEETING CHALLENGE 1

An effective program is built on a solid foundation of valid language learning principles. Establishing such a foundation does not involve doing a Ph. D. in Linguistics. It does involve examining, clarifying and refining our beliefs and understandings about language learning.

Ask
- ~ How do children learn language?
- ~ How do they best learn the skills, strategies and conventions of language?
- ~ How does language support other learning?
- ~ What conditions promote language development?
- ~ What is the teacher's role?

Before answering these questions...

Read
- ~ current teacher reference material
- ~ language curriculum documents.

Talk to
- ~ other teachers
- ~ language consultants.

Attend
- ~ language inservice courses
- ~ professional associations' workshops, seminars and conferences.

Observe ~ the conditions which promote language learning in the classroom.

Write ~ your beliefs about language learning and the aims that flow from these beliefs, e.g:

I believe...	Therefore I aim to...
• children learn language by using it.	• allow children to read, write, speak and listen every day.
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

Use the 'Points to Ponder' on the next page as a checklist to see if your beliefs align with current thoughts about language learning.

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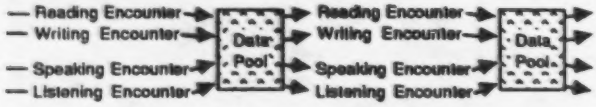
Points to Ponder before Programming

THE INTER-RELATIONSHIP OF READING, WRITING, SPEAKING AND LISTENING



What language users learn from a language encounter feeds a common pool of linguistic knowledge which can be drawn upon in a subsequent language encounter.

(Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984)

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

- Do I give equal attention to reading, writing, speaking and listening in my classroom?
- Do I plan reading, writing, speaking and listening activities which support and complement each other or are they isolated from each other?
- Do I give children opportunities to use what is in their personal linguistic data pool?
- Do I value their contributions?

SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES

For an individual to become literate, literacy must be functional, relevant and meaningful for individuals and the society in which they live. It must be able to meet the needs of individuals for their own social purposes and goals.

(Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984)

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

- Do I understand the role of literacy in the societies/cultures of my students?
- Do I try to match school experiences with social purposes and goals?
- Do I know what is significant and useful for my students?

APPRENTICESHIP

Children should be allowed to behave like apprentices – to be active partners in the task with the adult leading, not driving.

(Waterland, 1985)

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

- What is a legitimate role for me?
- When do I take an active role?
- When do I take a passive role?
- What types of activities allow children to behave like apprentices?

WHOLE LANGUAGE

Language is easy when :

It's real and natural.
It's whole.
It's sensible.
It's interesting.
It's relevant.
It belongs to the learner.
It's part of a real event.
It has social utility.
It has purpose for the learner.
The learner chooses to use it.
It's accessible to the learner.
The learner has power to use it.

Language is hard when:

It's artificial.
It's broken into bits.
It's nonsense.
It's dull and uninteresting.
It's irrelevant to the learner.
It belongs to someone else.
It's out of context.
It has no social value.
It has no purpose.
It's imposed by someone else.
It's inaccessible.
The learner is powerless.

(Goodman, 1986)

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

- Which of my language activities meet the criteria in the 'easy' list?
- Which of my activities meet the criteria in the 'hard' list?

AUTHENTICITY

Teachers must be authentic users and lovers of language.

(Holdaway, 1987)

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

- Do I provide authentic demonstrations?
- Do I read to the children?
- Do I write with the children?
- Do I share my reading and writing with genuine enthusiasm?
- Do I model active listening?
- Do I use correct speech?
- Do I use real materials such as newspapers, literature, posters, environmental print?
- Do the activities I plan have a real purpose?

CHALLENGE 2

To plan and document a language program which
~ infiltrates every subject area
~ enhances learning.

MEETING CHALLENGE 2

Language is part of every activity children engage in. It has a central role in all learning. In Science, Maths, Social Studies, Environmental Education, Health Studies and Visual Arts, children are using language, learning language and learning about language as well as learning. We need to acknowledge the importance of this language learning that occurs throughout the curriculum and to recognise the legitimacy of the language teaching that takes place in these other subject areas. So, if you are trying to juggle a Language unit as well as a Social Studies unit and a Science unit and a Maths unit and a Bicycle Education unit and a ... stop! You have to unclutter your day.

Ask
- ~ What language teaching/learning is already happening in other subject lessons?
- ~ Do I capitalise on the language teaching/ learning opportunities that arise in other subject lessons?
- ~ Do I have a real purpose for the language activities that are part of other subject lessons?
- ~ Do I teach language forms (oral and written) that are a necessary part of other subjects, e.g. interviews in Social Studies and reports in Science?

Before answering these questions...

Observe the speaking, listening, reading and writing that occurs during
- ~ a Science lesson
- ~ a Maths lesson
- ~ a Social Studies lesson.

Identify
- ~ the language forms used, e.g. informal conversation, letter, story, oral report, experiment, etc
- ~ the purposes of the language used, e.g. informing, reporting, justifying, etc
- ~ the audiences for the language used, e.g. peers, teacher, other adult, parents.

List
- ~ ways in which the children already use speaking, listening, reading and writing to enhance their learning in other subject lessons
- ~ ways in which children could use language to enhance their learning in other subject lessons
- ~ the skills, strategies and conventions that need to be taught so that the children can use language for learning.

CHALLENGE 3

To document a language program which
~ meets the unique needs of the children
~ is useful and helpful
~ is not too time-consuming
~ satisfies the requirements of the system
~ allows for the inclusion of spontaneous events
~ can be understood by others.

MEETING CHALLENGE 3

An effective program is a manageable one. It takes into account all the practical constraints of the situation in which it must operate. There is not much point in planning a literature-based language program if there is no children's literature in the classroom.

Ask
- ~ What are my children's needs, interests and abilities?
- ~ What resources are available?
- ~ What time is available?
- ~ What does the school policy require?
- ~ What does the supervisor expect?
- ~ What restrictions do the school and classroom environment impose?

Before answering these questions...

Read
- ~ school language policy
- ~ pupil profiles.

Examine
- ~ classroom library
- ~ school library
- ~ local library
- ~ other teachers' programs
- ~ a range of program formats
- ~ school/classroom environment
- ~ time allocated to school events, e.g. assemblies, scripture, sport.

Talk to
- ~ your supervisor
- ~ librarian
- ~ E.S.L. teacher
- ~ other teachers.

Decide
- a) broad focus of the program, e.g. Language, Social Studies, Science
- ~ aims of the program
- ~ duration of the program
- b) specific focus of the unit of work, e.g. Rules, Fantasy, Wind
- ~ objectives for speaking, listening, reading and writing and subject area
- ~ duration of the unit of work.

Select
- ~ a starting point for the unit of work
- ~ resources you will use.

Prepare ~ a framework for the unit of work, as in the following example.

BROAD FOCUS OF PROGRAM _____ DURATION OF PROGRAM _____

AIMS OF PROGRAM •

•

•

SPECIFIC FOCUS OF UNIT OF WORK

LANGUAGE OBJECTIVES

The children will use language for:

•

•

•

OTHER SUBJECT OBJECTIVES (if applicable)

The children will better understand:

•

•

•

CHALLENGE 4

To design and document teaching/learning activities which:

- ~ are open-ended
- ~ allow children to make choices
- ~ cater for a wide range of ability
- ~ allow for active student participation
- ~ engage children's interest
- ~ have a real purpose
- ~ have a real audience
- ~ involve risk taking
- ~ promote co-operative learning
- ~ encourage problem-solving processes.

MEETING CHALLENGE 4

We need a repertoire of language activities which meet the above criteria. We can then select the activities which best meet the children's language needs and their needs in regard to the subject area. This matching of worthwhile activities and children's needs is one of the essential ingredients of good teaching. Good teachers do it intuitively. But we all have difficulty documenting it. One reason for this difficulty, I suspect, is that we make a multitude of decisions 'on the run' when we are teaching and it is almost impossible to predict what those decisions will be. So don't despair if your unit of work starts out looking like a skeleton. It will gain weight and substance as you work through it with the children.

Ask

- ~ Which activities mesh speaking, listening, reading and writing?
- ~ Which activities enable me to demonstrate authentic language use?
- ~ Which activities provide me with useful information about how the children are operating as language users?
- ~ Which activities provide the children with useful feedback about the effectiveness of their language?
- ~ Which activities allow me to teach the skills, strategies and conventions of language in the context of real language use?
- ~ Which activities are fun?

Before answering these questions:

Observe

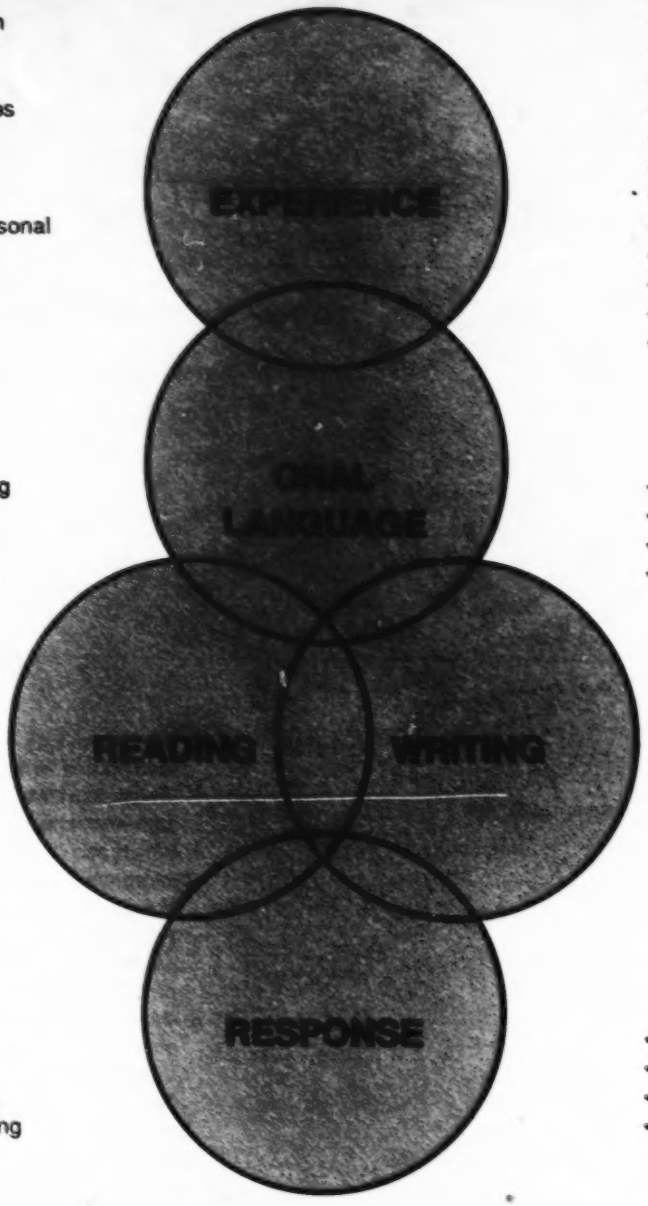
- ~ the language activities the children enjoy most
- ~ the activities which produce the most diverse, non-stereotyped language
- ~ the activities in which the children respond most freely.

Examine activities described in

- ~ teacher reference material
- ~ recent commercial teachers guides
- ~ PETA publications.

Select the language activities which are most worthwhile.

Programming Units of Work for Language



Experiences in
* Maths
* Science
* Social Studies
* Drama
* Music

Children's personal
* experiences
* hobbies
* interests

* literature
* excursions
* television
* newspapers
* school events
* photographs
* films
* video
* music
* visitors
* performances
* non-fiction

* brainstorming
* reporting
* retelling
* questioning

* giving directions
* interviewing
* discussing
* debating

* silent reading
* choral reading
* shared reading
* skimming
* scanning
* play reading
* readers' theatre

* notes
* reports
* letters
* stories
* poems
* posters
* journals

* modifying
* confirming
* questioning
* reconstructing

* evaluating
* sharing
* clarifying
* interpreting

Children need opportunities to use their language in a variety of social situations, e.g. small groups, pairs, whole class, with older/younger children and with different adults.

This model for programming units of work for language attempts to show how language, experience and response inter-relate. For example, our writing will be influenced by what we experience, what we talk about, what we hear, what we read and how people respond to our writing.

The linear nature of the model limits its ability to show variation and flexibility. For example, oral language is not necessarily a pre-requisite for reading and writing, nor must response always follow reading and writing.

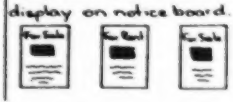
The model can be re-arranged in a number of different formations.

For example, if we are introducing a new area of Science we might begin with a 'hands on' experience. However, if we are working on an area that is very familiar to the children, we might begin by asking them to write about it. When planning a unit of work on Myths and Legends we might begin by reading lots of examples to the children and talking about them, so that they become aware of the style and structure of the language of Myths and Legends.

The following extract from a program shows some planned language activities for a unit of work. The activities are listed in discrete columns to ensure that opportunities are provided for speaking, listening, reading and writing. However, in practice, the activities overlap and interweave. As well, other regular language activities such as Sustained Silent Reading, Journal Writing and Shared Reading will occur. The numbers beside the activities show the most likely sequence for them. Other spontaneous activities and experiences will be added as the unit of work is implemented.

Broad Focus: Language / Literature / Environmental Education

Specific Focus: Home and Its Environment

EXPERIENCE	SPEAKING and LISTENING	WRITING	READING	RESPONSE
Starting Point 1. T shows chn cover of Amy's Place. (M. Stafford) 3. T reads Amy's Place to the chn. Other books One Night at Lottie's House (N. Dann) Keep Out (N. Young) First there was Frances (B. Graham) Thing (R. Klein) Our Cubby (L. Wilson) Boss for a Week (L. Handy)	2. Chn predict what they think the story is going to be about. 4. Whole class discuss: • Do you have a private place of your own at home? • What do you do there? • Do you ever invite anyone to share your private place? • Why? 10. T reads Boss for a Week 11. Whole class brainstorm. Chn tell rules which apply at home. T records on b.b. or butchers paper. e.g. Rules at Home • make own bed • feed cat • . • .	5. Chn (in pairs) recall and list details of Amy's home environment e.g. vegetable garden big tree 6. T compiles class list. Chn choose words for personal spelling lists 12. Chn write rules for their own real or imaginary private place. e.g. ——'s Place • no adults allowed • • 14. Chn who want to publish their designs and rules in class scrapbook revise, proof-read and edit their drafts • conference with friend • conference with T.	7. Chn read (alone or in pairs) books in class library e.g. Amy's Place Our Cubby Other books relevant to focus T asks chn to take notice of the home environments described 13. Shared reading (groups or pairs) of rules. 15. Individual and shared reading of 'Private Places' scrapbook. 	8. Sharing session (small group) Chn describe the home environments presented in the books they have read. Discuss similarities and differences. 9. Chn design own tree house/cubby house/private place using a variety of materials. 16. Role play. Chn select scenes from books read e.g. Boss for a Week Amy's Place Keep Out First there was Frances Thing Our Cubby
Starting Point 1. T shows and reads aloud from a real estate guide or a newspaper. Other experiences Visit a local Real Estate Agency if possible. or Invite a local real estate agent to visit the classroom to talk about his/her job.	2. T. asks chn to suggest what the abbreviations/ special words in the 'For Sale' and 'For Rent' sections mean. List and talk about the chn's suggestions. → T. helps chn prepare interview questions to ask the real estate agent. e.g. How do you decide what information to put in a 'For Sale' or 'For Rent' notice? T. and chn prepare questions prior to the visitors arrival.	5. Homework task. Chn walk around own homes (and yards) and list the features. e.g. Inside: • 2 bedrooms • lounge room • back verandah Outside: • 2 gum trees • carport 6. Chn draft a 'For Sale' or 'For Rent' notice for their own homes. T. asks chn to bring a photo or draw a picture of their homes. 8. Chn revise, proof-read and edit their drafts. 9. Publish 'For Sale' and 'For Rent' notices on cards and display on notice board. 	3. Cut up the 'Houses/Units For Sale/Rent' ads. Chn (in small groups) read a selection of ads and decide which house/unit they will buy/rent. 10. Shared and individual reading of notices. T encourages chn to find examples of 'advertising' language in the notices.	4. Sharing session. One child from each group reports group's decision and gives reasons for choice. Other chn question the decision and request explanation. 7. Writers Circle. Chn share drafts in small groups. T and peers ask questions to help writers clarify/expand the information in their notices. * If a real estate agent is coming to visit, T. lets chn role play an interview situation prior to the visit so chn are familiar with questioning.

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